

# Democracy and electoral process in nigeria politics essay



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The wave of decolonisation after World War II has led to a number of Third World nations, attempting to govern themselves through Western-style democratic Institutions. Almost all of them have failed. There have been various theories of democratic stability and explanations of democratic failure. In general, these theories agree that poor nations, with massive socio economic development needs and high popular expectation: as poorly integrated nations, with deep ethnic divisions; and as politically underdeveloped nations, with fragile party system, weak administrative bureaucracies, and little experience with the give-and-take of large representative institutions, Third world nations, at their present levels of development, have little realistic hope of sustaining democratic institutions.

According to Diamond (1988) the democratic renaissance in Africa has been led by the continents wealthiest and most populous nation, Nigeria. There was huge expectation after the return of power to civilian elected government in 1979, after thirteen years of military rule. This was to be a crucial test of liberal democracy in Africa (Sklar 1982). The system collapsed in less than four years as a result of massive corruption, mismanagement and electoral violence and fraud. This led to the military coup of 1983.

Democracy is defined as a political system which meets three essential conditions, namely, meaningful and extensive competition among individuals and political parties; a ' highly inclusive' level of political participation in the selection of leaders and policies; and a level of civil and political liberties sufficient to ensure the integrity of political competition and participation.

Other concepts related to these are democratic stability, the likelihood of its enduring over time, particularly through periods of unusual conflict, strain

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and crisis. Democratic theorists stress the peculiar degree to which the stability of democracy depends on a widespread belief in its legitimacy.

Democracy as it is practised in Western nations such as the United States usually involve a thorough process of contestant selections. This culminates in the primaries within individual parties. In this system, the party candidate is picked based on the acceptance of the individual's manifesto. There is also party loyalty and candidates do not defect to other parties or form entirely new ones if they do not win the primaries. In such systems, the total funds raised by each candidate are also monitored. This system is also transparent and voters are confident in the system to ensure that the best candidate wins.

## **Democracy and Electoral process in Nigeria**

According to J. Hershkovits (1979), Nigeria rejected Britain's parliamentary form of democracy which they had continued after independence in 1960 and chose the first wholly Nigerian-made constitution, to follow the American model instead. This choice was made with characteristic pragmatism: Nigeria, like the United States, is large, complex, and heterogeneous. There was therefore the notion that 'What works for America may work for Nigeria'. Nigeria's form of government looks familiar to the American style as the president has a four year term and has a possibility of a second term. The national assembly is bicameral, with a senate and a house of representatives distributed among the states by population. There is also the apex judiciary court known as the Supreme Court.

Nigeria's transition towards democracy has only begun. The re-establishment of an elected government after decades of military rule in 1999 formed merely a starting point in a transition process towards a democratic society—a transition that can be expected to take many years. Democratic government in its full sense comprises a wide area of issues; a very important one among them is the creation of accountable institutions (Harneit-Sievers 2004). Political parties form another core group of institutions in any functioning democratic system. Under current Nigerian conditions, however, most political parties are merely zero-issue alliances of influential individuals and small groups who are able to control; and, often enough manipulate party structures, candidacies and even the electoral process itself.

In Nigeria, a major issue impeding democracy is the selection process of political office holders. This is because so far, the country has been unable to hold free, fair and credible elections. The 2003 elections were billed as a landmark as it was the first time since independence in 1960 that political leadership changed hands from one civilian to another (Herskovits 2007). The election results showed overwhelming victories for the ruling party, PDP as the presidential winner received 70 percent of the votes. According to international and domestic observers alike, the elections themselves were 'disastrous' with even more rigging and violence than during the previous presidential elections in 1999. The run up to the elections also witnessed the assassination of two gubernatorial front runners and violent election related incidents.

Based on how expensive partisan politics is in Nigeria, governments at all levels will rather starve other sector than have their electoral ambition to suffer funding. This is apart from the fact that in most places, governance has almost been suspended for scheming ahead of the polls. As a result, Nigerians may therefore have to wait till elections are completed to enjoy several social amenities promised during the last tenure.

The electoral process has also witnessed legal challenges as contestants take election winners to court to contest such results. A memorable case of this is the Osun State elections which were overruled after three and half years. The election result stated that the incumbent governor, Oyinlola won the elections. The opposition took the election result to court. During the investigation process, it was discovered using biometric machine that several people has voted up to 30 times each for the incumbent governor. The court therefore asked that this votes be cancelled. This led to the opposition candidate Raufu Aregbesola becoming the governor. As a result of almost four years of uncertainty in the state, local and foreign investors lost confidence in the state. As a result, several companies already operating in the state closed and moved to other states. This led to massive retrenchment and increased unemployment in the state. It also caused a reduction in state revenue generated.

The electoral process in Nigeria has a negative impact on the country in general. This is because revenue that could be used to provide infrastructure needed by business are used for funding elections. This has led to continuous borrowing and deficit budget for year 2011. The total budget for the 2011 elections released by INEC was put at N89billion (\$659million). In <https://assignbuster.com/democracy-and-electoral-process-in-nigeria-politics-essay/>

the federal budget for 2011, another N46. 4 billion has been allocated to the same elections. Indeed, the total budgetary allocation for elections is about N133 billion naira. It is important to state that INECs budget for 2011 dwarfs the budget of most states of the federation. Osun state has budget of N88. 1 billion, Kwara state N68. 6 billion and Edo has a budget of N106 billion. It is also important to note that this would be funded by government borrowing. When compared to other developing countries such as Bangladesh, India and Ghana, the cost on per capita basis in Nigeria was more than double. INEC's N74 billion on voters register amounts to N1, 138 per capita for 65 million registered voters. Ghana conducted its 2008 elections at the cost of \$40million which amounts to \$3 per capita.

The instability caused by flawed elections has led to a threat to foreign investment. As a developing country, Nigeria required foreign investment to survive. The use of large sums of revenue for funding elections rather than developing infrastructure necessary for investment makes the country less desirable to investors. As a result, there is lack of confidence in the country. The political violence and killings have also affected the country's image abroad. There is also a threat to security as assassination of political aspirants and kidnap of their families is becoming rampant.

Recently, the government has taken various measures to ensure free and fair elections in Nigeria. This was affirmed by the sack of former INEC boss, Maurice Iwu who was widely accused of corruption and complacency in electoral result manipulation. The new INEC boss, Jega has committed to ensuring a free and fair election in the country. There has also been the

amendment of the electoral law in Nigeria in order to further curb the widespread election rigging in the country.

## **Conclusion**

The issue of political instability has affected the activities of multinational companies in Nigeria; the oil companies in the oil rich delta where kidnap is rampant have been seriously affected. Most multinational companies are currently closing their business and relocating to other countries with more favourable environment and required infrastructure. The level of uncertainty and instability disrupts the profit hunt and causes inability to meet corporate targets. In the political foyer, some groups have been neglected which is not a practice of true democracy as power is been controlled by the dominant party with large resources.

In order to reduce the problem of election rigging, Nigeria has to be firm in its commitment to providing free and fair election. This goes beyond paying lip service. The INEC also should be given more powers in order to prevent it been manipulated by the government. There is also the increased need for foreign observers to train and sensitise INEC officials and also to monitor elections.